The Jerseyman

Vietnam Return Cruise Remembrances

Rich Thrash, Brass Team Volunteer

The USS New Jersey fired her last observed mission of her Vietnam deployment on the evening of March 31, 1969 against an enemy bunker complex 3″ miles northeast of Con Thien. The aerial observer reported seven bunkers were destroyed. An additional 50 rounds of main battery and 815 rounds of secondary battery were fired unobserved through the night. The battleship remained on station until 0600 on April 1st, finishing her deployment where she had started more than six months earlier.

Those final rounds fired brought the total ordnance expended to nearly 12,000,000 pounds in 120 days on the gunline. Total rounds expended were 5,866 16-inch and 14,891 five-inch. The number of main battery rounds expended during her deployment to Vietnam was only 1,500 short of the total she had fired in World War II, two cruises to Korea, and several midshipmen cruises combined!

It should also be noted this was accomplished with a crew that was about half the size of her World War II complement. About his crew Captain Snyder said, *"The men on today's New Jersey are not afraid to experiment, to innovate, to reject old and begin new traditions. They are linked to their heritage yet not chained to the past. They are younger, better educated, and more individualistic than the men I knew as a junior officer on the Battleship Pennsylvania 25 years ago. The New Jersey crew is undoubtedly the finest and most professional group of men with which I have ever had the privilege of serving."*

After departing the gunline the ship made stops in Subic Bay and Yokosuka, Japan and on April 9th she set a course for home, scheduled to arrive in Long Beach, CA at 1000 hrs. on April 19th. On the morning of April 15th, when she was only 1,800 miles from Long Beach, USS New Jersey received a message which was clearly not part of any drill. The Officer of the Deck, received a voice signal to change course and detach immediately. The conning officer, gave the order to the helm, "left standard rudder, steer course 290" and the battleship was headed back to the Western Pacific.

A few hours earlier an EC-121 reconnaissance plane, flying on a routine mission, had been shot down by North Korean aircraft in international air space. A total of 31 American lives were lost in the Sea of Japan. As an immediate response to the incident, the president ordered a Naval task force to be formed and proceed into the Sea of Japan. To that end the USS New Jersey was ordered to Sasebo, Japan, in the event she would be needed. The ship proceeded at 25 knots, with an estimated time of arrival of first light on April 23rd.

It goes without saying this sudden turn-around surprised the crew, especially when they were just four days away from a long awaited reunion with family and friends, but the crew accepted it, this was duty. On the way to Japan the ship refueled from USS Kennebec (AO-36) on the 19th. While alongside she received a message from Commander Seventh Fleet changing her destination from Sasebo to Yokosuka, Japan. She arrived at 0951 on the 22nd, received fuel, stores and provisions, and departed seven hours later, amid much speculation as to her destination. In 13 days she had steamed 7,042 miles, averaging 22.4 knots!

Her real destination was a 100 mile in diameter operating area centered about 175 miles Southeast of Yokosuka. Shortly after reaching this area, the battleship was directed to rearm from USS Paracutin (AE-18), which had left Sasebo only hours earlier. She headed southwest to expedite the rendezvous and

on the afternoon of the 24th she began what would become the ships largest underway replenishment of the cruise. In ten hours alongside, she received 837 tons of 5-inch and 16-inch ammunition.

Following replenishment the battleship returned to her operating area, steaming at eight knots to conserve fuel. She arrived at the perimeter of her area at noon, thirty minutes later she was directed by Commander Seventh fleet to "Commence transit to CONUS." At 1235 the Officer of the Deck ordered "right full rudder, all engines ahead full, indicate turns for 22 knots, steer course 090."

For the second time in less than three weeks, the battleship was again on her way home from WESTPAC. As she departed, she received the following message from Vice Admiral William F. Bringle, Commander Seventh Fleet:

"I again bid you farewell. Your ready response to the unceremonious turnaround, your comprehension and discreet execution of orders and keen insight into the circumstances are most gratifying. Please extend to your officers and men my most sincere thanks for their forebearance and devotion to duty. I wish you all fair winds and following seas to expedite your delayed reunion with families and friends. Another well done..."

The trip home this time was fast and routine, and at 0900 on May 5th, the battleship arrived at her "home" berth at Pier E, where she was met by thousands of family and friends. This ended the ships Vietnam service and put her on a path to being decommissioned and placed into the reserve fleet for a third time.

Below are some remembrances from crew members about the cruise home from Vietnam.

Subic Bay Liberty

Subic Bay was a wild and wooly town. What can I say… it was a place to blow it out! Colorful jitneys everywhere, available to take you anywhere, for the right price. Young Virgins a plenty… or so the advertising goes. I remember the alligator pit outside of Pauline's Bar. Lesson learned there. Holy cow… watch out for the Butterfly knives.

Run to Korea

After our deployment to Vietnam, the New Jersey headed back to the U.S. in company with a carrier and a destroyer. We were to stop in Hawaii for a few days of liberty, then head on to our homeport; Long Beach, CA. Everyone was anxiously awaiting a reunion with their loved ones, many of whom would be awaiting our arrival on the Navy pier.

As the world knows, a U.S. Military reconnaissance plane was shot down over international waters by North Korea. While steaming with the ships in our formation the New Jersey received orders to terminate electronic transmissions (EMCON E), turnabout and make a certain course… no destination given. We could still monitor radio traffic, listen only, but not transmit. The carrier in our company wanted to know what we were doing, where were we going. The signal bridge flashed them with signal lights that we were obeying higher orders.

No one aboard could notify wives, family or friends waiting in Long Beach of our change in orders and that we would not arrive at our homeport as planned. We needed fuel, food and ammo replenishment, so supply ships were sent to specific coordinates to meet us. When a helicopter brought shore bomb charts for North Korea, we pretty well got the picture.

After maneuvering in a specific holding area for several weeks, we were then released to return to our homeport, Long Beach, CA. Upon arrival, I was notified to take emergency leave and return home; my mother was in a near fatal automobile accident and in intensive care.

Weathering the Storm

I was the JA (Captain's Battle Circuit) phone talker, port side, during the storm. It scared me because the waves were actually breaking over the bridge up to the Fire Control Radar (05 level), and as the water washed back down, visibility out the windows was completely obscured. I was watching Japanese merchant ships disappear into troughs and then reappear ten minutes later somewhere else. I could just

picture their crewmen running around in fear.

When a huge wave slammed into and gutted the starboard forward quarterdeck shack, that set off the general alarm. Simultaneously, someone in Combat said to me over the sound powered phone, "man overboard." I reported it and the OOD (Lt. Seay) who looked at me dumbfounded, almost like frozen in time! I said, "that's what they're telling me!" That event really frightened me because all I could envision was the motor whaleboat and crew getting lost at sea. To this day, I don't know what really caused that bogus report.

Quite the experience!

Jeremiah Early and Bob McCann

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The Story of the Infamous Coffee Cup

George Stavros, RM1, USNR (Ret.)

I'm probably the only crew member of the Vietnam era who knows about that coffee cup you wrote about in the newsletter and thought you might be interested in the background and how that all came about. By the way, one of my favorite TV shows is "Mysteries at the Museum" on the History Channel and you should seriously consider contacting the producers about doing a segment on the coffee cup at the New Jersey museum. They focus on odd and unusual artifacts from historical events of the past. I think this story, along with the unusual setting of a battleship museum, would be right up their alley and garner some great publicity for the ship.

Here's the background. In April, 1969 we were happily steaming east from the western Pacific for home following our Vietnam deployment. During that deployment, we provided fire support for thousands of our troops and attacked enemy targets in both North and South Vietnam. We often did what was called Harassment and Interdiction fire, which consisted of shelling at random in enemy territory to harass and interdict enemy troop and supply movements. The Big J was so effective at this that we were referred to as the Galloping Grey Ghost of the Vietnam Coast. We heard of intelligence reports that found that whenever we were sailing near the coast, enemy troop and supply movements measurably stopped or declined out of fear of the long reach of our 16-inch guns.

The impact we had became evident when on our way home North Korea shot down an unarmed EC-121 U.S. electronic intelligence plane spying along the North Korean coast in international air space. We suddenly got orders to reverse course and head for the area. Because of our impact in Vietnam, and the fact that we were at the time the only active battleship in the world and our capability, it was felt at the highest level that sending the Big J to the area was the quickest and most effective way to project American power in the area. The story of that sudden turnaround in deepest secrecy has been told many times including the fact that hundreds of family members who were traveling to our home port of Long Beach, California to greet their sailors would be deeply disappointed since our turnaround as made in utmost secrecy. As a radioman aboard, I was privy to the communications we received.

Our orders were direct and simple and came directly from the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the direction of the White House: steam towards North Korea, get off all shipping lanes and disappear. I stared wide-eyed at the list of addressees on the communications to us: The White House, Joint Chiefs of Staff, ComSeventhFleet, etc. Furthermore, we were specifically ordered to report directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff with information to the White House and other high-level commands our periodic position but otherwise we were removed from operational control by the Seventh Fleet and other normal authority. It was not until the day before we were scheduled to arrive in Long Beach that the Navy Department issued a terse statement: We are able to confirm that the USS New Jersey will not arrive as scheduled in Long Beach. There was no further comment and the Navy refused to offer any additional information or explanation although every effort was made to accommodate and care for the hundreds of family members who were suddenly stranded on the West Coast. We later learned that the intent was to create fear and uncertainty in North Korea as to where we were, where we were headed and what we would do, exploiting the fear our presence caused among the enemy in Vietnam.

So it was in that atmosphere that one day I approached Captain Snyder on the flying bridge of the Big J as we sailed somewhere in the western Pacific with some communications we had received. Naval communications could only be released for transmission off the ship with the permission of the captain or other designated authority and immediately, our position was classified as confidential rather than the normal unclassified designation. After Captain Snyder read the messages I had for him he took an empty paper coffee cup he had been drinking from and scribbled a position report on it and released it by signing the cup and handing it to me for transmission. That was classic Captain Snyder: direct, unassuming and simple. I was taken aback but headed for Main Communications with the cup where I announced that we had a priority outgoing message and handed the cup to the operator on duty. He stared at the cup incredulously being sure it was some sort of joke. I laughed and pointed out, "The Captain released it." So the position report was sent out high priority as all our reports were and to the high command addressees that had become routine. When the message had been transmitted, I wrote the transmission confirmation information on the cup, stamped it "Confidential" to reflect its security level, and then was faced with how to file the outgoing original as was normal. I took the cup and punched two holes in it so I could place it on the outgoing original message clipboard and flattened the cup so it would fit. After all, it was an official outgoing message original and the regulations and procedures said nothing about handling it any differently because it was written on a coffee cup instead of a message form or even a flat scrap of paper.

Some months later after we had returned to port and it was announced that Captain Snyder would be relieved, I could not get that coffee cup out of my mind. So I went to the files and retrieved the cup and of course the information on it was now declassified since we were long gone from the western Pacific and I made a copy of the information and put it in the files to replace the cup. I took the cup to one of the machinist mates who made small wooden plaques for various awards and asked him to mount the cup on one of them and I presented the plaque with the cup on it to the captain as a souvenir. He was delighted.

Until I read your item in the newsletter, I had been unaware that this became a treasured memento of his for over 40 years and that it had been in his private collection. I am absolutely delighted it will become a treasured part of the Vietnam era memorabilia aboard the ship and I know that's exactly the way he would have wanted it.

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Flying the Ensign from the Flag Gaffs on the Radar Platform

Rich Thrash, Brass Team Volunteer

For a long time we had been unable to fly the Ensign from the flag gaffs mounted on the aft end of the radar platform. There are two gaffs, each having positions for three pulleys, but over the years the pulleys became unserviceable and eventually we could no longer hoist the Ensign from that location. We had flown the Ensign from that location from the first day the ship arrived at her memorial pier and I was unhappy that we couldn't fly it from there anymore.

Time passed and when our new CEO came onboard he expressed an interest in flying the Ensign from the gaffs on the radar platform too. Like me he felt that when visitors walk down the pier to the ship they should see the Ensign flying high from such a prominent location. He and I talked about it for a while and finally we decided we were going to get the materials needed to make the repairs so we could again fly the Ensign from there.

Challenge number one was to go up on the radar platform, roughly 200 feet above the main deck, assess the condition of the existing components, and determine what needed to be repaired/replaced. Safety was our number one concern on this project so we reached out for help from a friend of the Battleship, Rick Conner, who climbs towers for a living. I've been up on the radar platform in the past and I felt very safe up there, and the view was amazing, but to accomplish this work we needed a professional. On March 8th we had an All Hands meeting in the Wardroom, after that a bunch of us set off to the O11 level. From there Rick Conner and Gene "Ski" Furmanski, from the ships Radio Club, made the climb up to the platform to conduct the inspection. The mounting points for all six pulleys were in good shape so we decided we would replace them all and buy all new line to rig them.

For the next two weeks I looked high and low to locate pulleys and carabineers that were Made in the USA to mount the pulleys to the gaffs. That might not sound like much of a challenge, but believe me it was. In

the end I found pulleys and carabineers made for climbers that were very lightweight, strong and proudly stamped with the words Made in the USA. In my mind nothing less would due for this application!

With pulleys and carabineers in hand I made the trip to the ship on March 22nd and when I arrived everyone was there and ready to make it happen. This time Rick and Gene went up to the radar platform, and Dave Burgess, Phil Rowan and I positioned ourselves on the forward missile deck and the O5 level. One by one the new pulleys were installed and rigged with new line, and soon we had all six ready to go. By 3:00 in the afternoon the aloft crew joined us on the forward missile deck and we hoisted the Ensign putting huge smiles on the faces of everyone there.

When I left that day the Ensign was flying and I was a happy camper. Sadly though by the time I got home to Virginia I had an e-mail saying the Ensign had been lowered by the curator citing several reasons why it shouldn't be flown from that location. According to Navy Regulations the Ensign is only to be flown from that location while at sea, and that while in port the proper place to fly the Ensign is on the stern. Needless to say I was no longer happy, but this battle was out of my control.

What resulted though was a compromise, a list of some two dozen or so days a year when we can fly the Ensign from the radar platform gaffs. These are days life Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, July 4th, etc. The curator is a stickler on stuff like this and I'm okay with that, mostly because I have no choice but to be...

Rick Conner hanging from the port side gaff while installing one of the new pulleys, remember don't try this at home, this man is a professional!

Shot of the Ensign flying from the location we saw the pulley being installed in above.

View from the pier as I departed the ship. Happy Camper...

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

Camden Fire Department to the Rescue

Rich Thrash, Brass Team Volunteer

Who do you call if there is a cat stuck in a tree, the local fire department right? Okay, so who do you call if you need to retrieve a pair of antenna wires that are part of your ships Fan Antenna that are dangling about 80 or 90 feet up in the air? Well in our case we also called the fire department.

Following our recent success with repairing the flag gaffs on the radar platform the ships Radio Club was looking for a way to retrieve two dangling antenna wires. These two dangling wires can be seen in the

photo above, just to the left and slightly above the forward stack. For a better description of what was involved I have included an excerpt below from an e-mail from Dave Burgess of the Radio Club.

Located high above the main deck of the ship is the Fan Antenna which consists of 6 heavy gauge wires running fore and aft between the 2nd and 3rd yardarms; 3 wires on the port side and 3 on the starboard side. At the forward end of each set of 3 wires is a basket weave of 3 more wires, tying the fore to aft wires together electrically, then extending to the feed line termination box on the top foremast.

About 5-years ago it was noticed that one of the starboard tie wires had broken free of the termination box and was hanging down from the main group of antenna wires. A couple of weeks later a second tie wire was observed to also be hanging down. Time for a trip to the radar platform to make repairs? Think again since the hanging wires are located far above the nearest deck and far below the radar platform, while being some distance from the forward funnel (exhaust stack).

Over the years we have often looked for a way to get a rope around the free end of these hanging wires so as to pull them up to the radar platform for repairs and re-attachment to the termination box.

So, in an effort to retrieve these wires Dave Burgess sent out an e-mail to a large group of Radio Club members and Volunteers asking if anyone had a light weight pole, about 30 or 40 feet long, to aid in snagging the wayward wires. In response to that e-mail Dave received a call from Bill Stroup, one of our quarterdeck staff and proud owner of a 1953 Mack Fire truck which he has restored and takes to shows. As a local fireman Bill has many contacts in area fire departments and he was able to arrange for the Camden City Fire Department to bring their 100' aerial truck down to the ship on Saturday April 26th. They positioned the truck against the edge of the pier and made the climb up to the 2 hanging wire ends. They attached some ľ line to the wires and dropped the free ends down to the forward missile deck to be tied off until they could be pulled up to the Radar Platform. Those lines have since been hauled up to the radar platform using the newly repaired flag lines and so mission accomplished.

Many thanks to Captain Joel Bain, and the Saturday Crew of Camden Fire Department Truck One, from all us aboard the Battleship New Jersey. A job well done, and far beyond the call of duty. And thanks Bill Stroup for making this success possible.

This was the scene when I arrived Saturday morning, these guys had the right tool to get the job done!

Wow, that's quite a reach, they are up to about the O8 or O9 level, pretty impressive.

Here's Bill, manning the quarterdeck and polishing the bell, now that's what I call multi-tasking!

This is Bill's baby, a 1953 Mack Fire Truck. You can't see his face in this photo but I'm sure he is smiling. His truck

has won awards in the past and on this day, at the West Chester, PA Fireman's Convention last fall, his truck took Third Place, Privately Owned Antiques 1950 - 1988.

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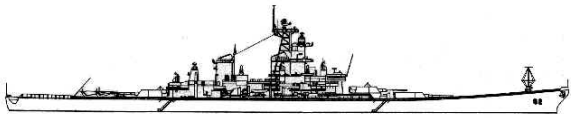

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